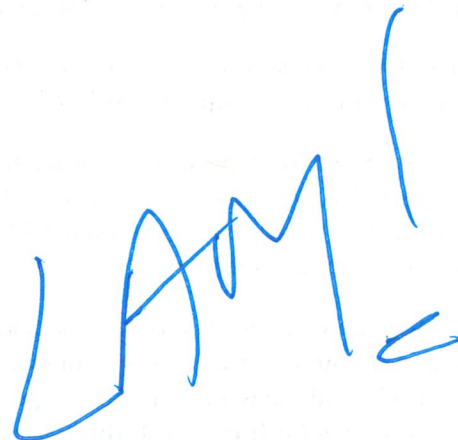3/6/2014

Adverse Actions in the Workplace

Consequences of Negative Workplace Behavior

Walker W. Watson

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Executive Summary

Smart employers design their workplace to ensure it's used only for work. Knowledge sharing, policies, open communication, and guiding principles make the difference between a productive professional workplace and one beset with issues and complaints.

This research paper will document some of the consequences of "Adverse" behavior in the workplace, as well as some suggestions and guidelines of "Positive" behavior. It will especially address the following topics:

- Behaviors
- Boundaries
- Personalities
- Attitudes
- Perceptions and Communication Styles

What exactly is acceptable office behavior?

What makes a business thrive and be a positive place to work is the energy within the unit as a whole and that all stems from proper workplace behavior.

Behavior in the workplace can make or break the success of a business. Showing respect for all of your co-workers, from your superiors to the employees who clean your bathroom is the best path to success. By treating your co-workers with respect and loyalty, it will be shared and will keep your work relations running smoothly.

For a person with an authoritative position in the company, it is extremely important to continue to let the employees know you are the boss and you demand that the work be done, but there is the right way to go about this, and the wrong way. The right way, of course is to **give credit where credit is due to employees who have gone the extra mile and completed their work well and in a timely fashion. Rewarding them accordingly will let the other employees see what they should strive for and will hopefully do a better job the next time**. Giving your team a "tongue lashing" for an incomplete job is not what they need to motivated them to work properly. Stand firm in your expectations, stating clearly what is desired and expected out of them, but do that in a positive "I know you can do it" type of spirit.

Proper workplace behavior makes all the difference in the world to make a business run smoothly. Remember the motto that **Respect is given when respect is shown**, and you will see a drastic difference in your work environment.

The following article describes a type of workplace situation that can happen when mutual respect and firm expectations are not in place within a workplace.

"Workplace Bullying & Violence: TSA & Rolando Negrin

November 26th, 2010 - Erin Johnston

Workplace Bullying & Violence

As potential passengers worry about privacy issues related to the newly installed full-body scanners at our airports, it is interesting to consider the experience of TSA personnel being trained on the use of the machines.

Part of the training exercise included, apparently, TSA staff or at least some TSA screeners (TSOs) being scanned by the new imaging devices as their coworkers and supervisors looked on at the resultant image through the viewer.

Imagine the discomfort of having to strip-down naked in front of your co-workers as part of a mandatory sanctioned training exercise. Then imagine having not just co-workers, but a supervisor start snickering and mocking your physical person out in the open. Apparently this happened to Rolando Negrin who worked out of the Miami International Airport.

According to reports, Rolando Negrin, **a TSA screener at Miami International Airport, went through the full-body scanner in a training exercise. His supervisor immediately started making negative comments and joking about the size of Negrin's genitals. According to Negrin, co-workers then teased him on a daily basis.**

About a year later, on May 4, 2010 Negrin physically assaulted a co-worker, Hugo Osorno, in the employee parking lot. **When arrested the day after the assault, Rolando Negrin, told police "co-workers made fun of him on a daily basis and ... he could not take the jokes anymore and lost his mind".** According to The Smoking Gun website:

> *Negrin wrote that, despite his pleas, coworkers would not cease mocking him after the scanner gave them a revealing look at his genitalia. He recalled that he was mockingly asked, "Roly, what size are you?" Coworkers, he added, called him "little angry man," laughed off his pleas for compassion, and abused him in front of passengers.*

It is disturbing that no apparent investigation was made into the allegations of the supervisor and other co-workers teasing. It seems that what is being referred to as **teasing was abusive workplace bullying behavior started by an employer requiring TSA employees to virtually strip down in front of one another, exacerbated by a supervisor's clearly inappropriate comments during training, and carried out by co-workers throughout the year.** If Negrin wished that his abuse would end, his assault on his co-worker only made things worse as news accounts of this story not only continue the abusive ridiculing of Negrin, but also assume the abusive supervisor and coworkers were stating a fact."

Regardless of the industry, at some point every employer will have to respond to a specific workplace incident of inappropriate behavior. Unfortunately, similar to the cases above, they will not always be

aware of the issue until significant and possible irreparable damage has been done to the organizational reputation.

Employers should adopt a proactive conflict resolution program that includes confidential workplace conflict mediation as well as employee training that focuses on building conflict resolution and communication skills. Such a program ensures that all employees have the opportunity to confidentially and proactively address inappropriate behaviors before they become a problem.

In offices across America, good people are engaging in some extremely obnoxious behavior: talking over each other in meetings, failing to respond to e-mails, showing up late to appointments or blowing them off entirely with a hurried text message.

Psychiatrist Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., says that the issue isn't that the human species is devolving into ill-mannered automatons. **Rather, the accelerated pace of office life has us made us lose touch with common courtesies once taken for granted, like saying, "Good morning."**

Much of the problem can be attributed to our relationship with technology, and the unrelenting stream of incoming information–from e-mails and IMs to cellphones and texts–that it offers**. In order to cope, we screen things out. And all too frequently, it's the people around us who don't make the cut.**

Technology, of course, was supposed to make life easier and give us more time. And it does enable us to do many things more quickly than before: type documents, send invoices. But there is a price. It has also created an expectation that all tasks can be accomplished as quickly as it takes to check a Wikipedia page.

Establishing Rules, Creating Boundaries

Obviously, all this technology isn't going away, and for the foreseeable future many offices will continue to run on skeleton staffs. So how do we wrest back control and start being civil to each other again?

Hallowell says employers are starting to recognize that information overload is also bad for the bottom line. Companies like Google and the software company SAS are taking steps to factor more breathing room into their employees' schedules. At SAS, for example, employees are told to leave the office at 5 p.m., and they have on-site health care, day care, dry-cleaning and a fitness center.

"It's the idea of taking good care of the brains that work for you," says Hallowell. "The old model of just flogging workers may have worked for the slave ships, but with the brain it just doesn't work."

Even without in-house elliptical machines, Hallowell says that executives need to recognize the importance of down time. **"If everyone is available 24/7, as some mangers want them to be, performance suffers, as does morale and health,"** he says. "When you begin to recreate boundaries–turn off e-mail, close the door and have time for thinking and working–mental energy is replenished and politeness improves."

Boundaries

Breached boundaries have no place in a modern, healthy work environment.

Bullying and intimidation might seem childish in a workplace, but it is all too common in forms both different and similar to bullying you witnessed in school

Sometimes it's a manager or boss who is harsh on other workers. An aggressive employee can intimidate anyone, and groups of more senior employees can "team up" and pick on a new hire or another employee.

Every time someone tries to break into that little bubble we carry around us – our "personal space"-an alarm should go off inside our head. Crossing or entering someone else's personal space creates discomfort because he/she feels the physical intimacy exceeds the relational intimacy.

Just What Are Boundaries?

The definition of a boundary is the ability to know where you end and where another person begins. When we talk about needing space, setting limits or determining acceptable behavior, we are really talking about boundaries.

Boundaries can be a difficult concept to grasp because they aren't something that we can see and sometimes they are questionable. But just because we can't see them, it doesn't mean that they aren't there or that they aren't important.

Boundaries are present whenever a person or department interfaces with another person or department.

Why Are Boundaries Important?

Boundaries are important because they define the limits and responsibilities of the people with whom you interact. **Clearly defined boundaries allow an organization to work more efficiently**. Setting proper boundaries can result in a sense of accountability for all staff members. Job responsibilities can be more precisely assigned and job performance can be more accurately measured.

Boundaries are important to maintaining good productivity and social dynamics within the work environment. Without boundaries, there are no firm guidelines for behavior.

Weak boundaries or having no boundaries can cause an unhealthy work environment and lead to: Poor performance, workplace bullying, low morale and over-worked employees are a result of no boundaries. Disrespectful staffs, sexual harassment, acts of violence, legal liability and reduced motivation to take on additional tasks or responsibilities are all part of undefined boundaries.

The Three Types of Boundaries

1. **Job Responsibility Boundaries** - Individual job responsibilities and duties.
2. **Interpersonal Boundaries** - Interaction with co-workers and managers in the work place.
3. **Personal Boundaries** - Special/individual boundaries.

1. Job Responsibility Boundaries

Job responsibility boundaries are established by your boss and help define your basic responsibilities and reporting relationships. They also help to establish accountability.

Questions like "Who gives you your assignments?", "To whom do you report?", "Who gives you feedback?", "Who sets your work priorities?", "Do you treat all staff members and clients fairly without positive or negative feelings influencing your decisions?" These questions help employees understand their work role boundaries.

> *Note: Proper procedures for serious boundary violations should be outlined in your company's employee manual. Violations such as sexual harassment, physical or mental abuse, stealing, etc. should NOT be tolerated. If a client is involved in any of the above situations please remember your role as a mandatory reporter*

2. Interpersonal Boundaries

Some of the **Interpersonal Boundaries** include but are not limited to: A person's tone of voice, their attitudes and approach used with co-workers. The ability to focus on work objectives even with people you do not like and being able to set limits with others who have poor boundaries.

Sometimes your employer sets specific policies surrounding interpersonal boundaries. Examples of these are: Limiting work conversations and e-mails to appropriate topics, i.e. no sexual or personal topics, no discussion of salaries or politics, etc.

3. Personal Boundaries

Personal boundaries are divided into three types

1. **Physical Boundaries** - Physical boundaries refer to the area directly around a person that he/she considers his territory or domain (their "personal space"). This is generally accepted to be 2.5 to 3 feet (Crisis Prevention Institute, 2001).
2. **Mental Boundaries** - Mental boundaries include a person's beliefs, thoughts, decisions, and choices (Whitfield, 1993).
3. **Emotional Boundaries** - Emotional boundaries refer to a person's self-esteem and feelings

Boundary Violations

There are two types of boundary violations

1. **External**
2. **Internal**

External Boundary Violations
External boundary violations include not having another's permission for the following:

- Standing in his/her space.
- Touching, getting into his/her belongings and living space (purse, wallet, mail, closet, etc.).
- Listening to his/her personal conversation.
- Not allowing a person to have privacy or violating a person's right to privacy.
- Exposing others to contagious disease, and smoking around nonsmokers in a nonsmoking area.

Internal Boundary Violations
Internal boundary violations may include:

- Indicating by word or deed that another person is worth less
- Yelling or screaming, ridiculing or making fun of another
- Lying
- Breaking a commitment for no reason
- Attempting to control or manipulate another
- Being sarcastic
- Interrupting

How do we maintain appropriate boundaries while in a workplace?
We maintain appropriate boundaries by conducting ourselves in a professional manner at all times...from the moment you first meet your co-workers and clients and every day afterward.

Some suggestions to consider:
We should always dress in appropriate, non-revealing attire. Always greet your co-worker or client with a handshake, not a hug, high-five or fist bump. It's best to maintain a proper demeanor at all times (no profanity or racial or gender slurs). Occasionally it's okay to use humor as long as it's not demeaning or inappropriate in any way and does not compromise your professionalism. Remember that you, you co-workers and your clients are guests in your employer's workplace.

Even when taking preventive measures, you may still find yourself in an awkward position from time to time. That's why it's so important to manage your own behavior.

For instance....

- If a co-worker gets too close to you or touches you in a way that makes you uncomfortable, step away and begin discussing something relative to their work.
- If he or she brings up a subject you find inappropriate, redirect the conversation to the particular task being performed and its importance, or to another topic.

- If a co-worker repeatedly makes you uncomfortable, make sure to address it with your supervisor. If all else fails, it may be necessary to reassign the co-worker to another area.

How Close Is Too Close?

The size of the personal space bubble varies by culture and situation. **The best estimates for personal physical space are approximately 24.5 inches (60 cm) on either side, 27.5 inches (70 cm) in front and 15.75 inches (40 cm) behind.**

Americans usually have larger personal space boundaries than people from other cultures. If you notice someone backing up a little while talking to you, don't step toward them as they most likely feel uncomfortable with the lack of distance between you.

Under certain circumstances people can accept having their personal space entered without experiencing discomfort. Examples might include romantic encounters and crowded subways or events. In business environments people typically maintain more personal space between them than in social situations. Also, personal space boundaries between a man and a woman usually remain larger than those between two women.

People who live in highly populated areas often have a smaller personal space bubble than those who live in less populated areas. People of higher status or wealth usually have larger personal space bubbles as well.

How to Set Boundaries at Work

You may think that getting ahead at work means doing everything anyone asks of you, even if it makes you crazy. Actually, **one key to success is setting boundaries so that you don't become overloaded and can do your best work on each assignment.**

1. **Leave the office for lunch.** By law, most jobs entitle you to a one-hour lunch break. This is your time to take a mental break from work, relax and recharge for the afternoon. **Take your lunch break out of the office to ensure that others respect your time.** You can go out for lunch or just take a walk.
2. **Understand your job description. Know what tasks are your responsibilities and which aren't.** When your boss or a co-worker asks you to do something, know whether it's actually part of your job. You may choose to accept the assignment even if it isn't your job, but you should always be aware when you're going beyond the boundaries of your position--and find an opportunity to let your boss know, too.
3. **Prioritize. Know which tasks on your daily roster are most important.** This way when someone asks you to take on an additional assignment, you can honestly tell him you don't have time in the day. You might offer to complete the assignment the following day instead.
4. **Be realistic about your time.** In an eight-hour day, you can't complete 12 hours' worth of work. **Limit yourself to taking on only the tasks you can complete in a day.** If someone asks you for help with an additional assignment, consider how long it will take and how much you're already committed to accomplishing that day.

Personalities

The Role of Personality in the Workplace

Workplaces are dictated not only by policies but also the personalities of employees. **Trying to stifle personality can result in disgruntled and frustrated employees**. When managers understand the role of personality in the workplace, they can use it to grow the company and move it forward.

- **Creativity**
  A person's ability to think creatively stems from her personality. Brainstorming sessions and one-on-one idea exchanges with employees can help spark creativity. When employees are allowed to apply their creativity to solving problems and issues, the company benefits from a wider variety of ideas and options for success.
- **Retention**
  Appealing to an employee's individual personality can help increase job satisfaction and reduce employee turnover. For example, rather than assume that all employees welcome challenges, you should talk with them to gauge their feelings on job duties. Some employees might prefer routine jobs with few changes or surprises, while others might look forward to challenges. By gauging employee personalities, you can better match employees with job duties.
- **Teamwork**
  Some people are not inclined to work well in a team. They are strongly independent, or they prefer to follow their own set of instructions. These personality traits are important to discover in the interview process through written tests and personal discussions. **Hiring someone who does not value teamwork can significantly hinder a work team's progress.**
- **Production**
  Some people are just not motivated and cannot be motivated. When their personal productivity drops and they are consistently behind on deadlines, they drag down their department and the company as a whole. **This also causes resentment and frustration among staffers who are forced to work harder to make up for the drop in productivity.** They may even slow down their own productivity if the uninspired employee is kept on at the company. A general drop in morale will occur.

Personality Types in the Workplace

The business workplace is a dynamic collection of colleagues with distinct perspectives and approaches to the job and to interpersonal relationships. Theories about personality types guide individuals, teams and owners toward greater self-awareness, to improve productivity and to elevate the culture of the business.

The seven styles of workplace behavior provide one model for evaluating your team.

7 Basic Styles of Workplace Behavior

by Katrina C. Arabe | February 15th, 2005

From the shrinking violet "avoider" to the flamboyant "performer," a business consultant says that employees fall into seven categories. Which one are you?

In the workplace, we behave in seven "classic" ways these general categories may not encapsulate all the actions of your co-workers, but they will give you insight into how to better deal with them:

Commanders

Curt and controlling, commanders don't waste time on niceties. While they don't mean to offend, they often forsake tact to get their point across. *"Value and validate commanders for their ability to overcome obstacles, to implement, and to achieve results."*

Drifters

Averse to structure, drifters often have trouble with rules, work hours and deadlines. They lose track of details and can neglect to see a project through to completion. While they're warm and affable, their disorganization can be off-putting. *"Value and validate drifters for their innovation and creativity, their ability to improvise on a moment's notice, and their out-of-the-box thinking."*

Attackers

Ill-tempered and contemptuous, attackers can have a dampening effect on workplace morale. They tend to criticize others in public, believing themselves to be superior. As managers, they can push subordinates to the breaking point. In response, you should keep interactions as short and affect-free as possible. As subordinates, attackers can demoralize your entire staff. *"Value and validate attackers for their ability to take on the ugly, unpopular assignments no one else has the mettle to do, and for their ability to make unemotional decisions."*

Pleasers

Considerate, sociable and friendly, pleasers rarely deny the requests of others and think of colleagues as extended family members. They have trouble coping with conflict, avoiding it as much as they can. *"Value and validate pleasers for the way they humanize the workplace, and for their helpful, collaborative work style."*

Performers

Witty, charismatic and outspoken, performers engage and entertain others in the workplace. They are skillful at promoting themselves, taking credit—even when it's not due—for successful projects and appearing to be in a rush to get important things done. *"Value and validate performers for their ability to establish new relationships,*

Avoiders

Clinging to the status quo, avoiders shy away from increased responsibility because they fear it will make them more visible and accountable. Reticent and reserved, they thrive when working alone and establishing safe, closed-off environments. They do as they're told and do not take initiative. As superiors, avoiders may hamper subordinates' advancement by turning down new projects. *"Value and validate avoiders for their reliability, for their meticulous attention to your instructions, and for getting the job done right the first time, every time."and for their persuasive and public speaking skills."*

Analyticals

Meticulous, thorough and cautious, analyticals can get mired in details. When presented with a new idea, they tend to focus on the reasons why it will fail and should not be pursued. They feel compelled to check, double-check and triple check their work for any inaccuracies. *"Value and validate analyticals for their commitment to accuracy, and for their ability to anticipate and evaluate risk far enough in advance to allow risks to be reduced."*

Jungian Personality Types in the Workplace

Jungian personality theory, the basis for the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, categorizes personalities along the spectrums of introverts and extroverts, sensing and intuitive types, thinking and feeling types and judging and perceiving types. Most employees fall somewhere along each spectrum, with tendencies toward one or the other type.

Reduced to letters indicating each type, a team member might, for example, exhibit Introvert, Intuitive, Thinking and Judging INTJ tendencies. A Jung personality profiler shows you how to apply information about employees to issues such as conflict management and management decisions.

Personality Types and Individuals

Individuals can benefit from information about their personality types. **When business employees understand what drives their preferences and approaches to their work, they can set suitable goals and opt for positions in which they do work that suits their types.**

As a business manager/director, you can guide individuals into high-performance positions, thereby creating a win-win situation between you and the employee. If, for instance, an employee has a Myers-Briggs Introvert preference, she will work more efficiently in a quiet environment doing detailed work such as research.

Perceptions and Communication Style

What's In Your Cultural Baggage?

Our values, assumptions, biases, and communication styles are some of the things that turn up in our cultural baggage. Neatly folded into one corner of the bag might be your views of time. In the other corner, you have your expectations about gender roles. Check that zippered side pouch and you may find your sense of personal space and comfort level with confrontation. And then there are the countless gestures and mannerisms that inevitably tumble out of your overstuffed bag when you least expect it.

Become Culturally Aware Of Yourself.......

A lack of awareness of your own cultural traits can make you feel vulnerable, frustrated and fearful. Interactions with people from other cultures might leave you thinking; "That's so backward", "They're so lazy! How uptight!"

Although some of **these reactions—or judgments—are based on individual personality, many of them are based on a set of expectations and perceptions instilled in us by our respective cultures. Becoming aware of the nuances that comprise our own cultures is extremely important.**

Here are some things to ponder as you begin to take stock of your own culture:

- How close do you usually stand from a friend while talking? How about a business colleague? A stranger? How close is too close?
- How much eye contact is too much? Too little? Why?
- How comfortable are you when a friend touches your shoulder or pats your arm while talking with you? A colleague? An acquaintance? When does it become too much?
- When do you show up for a party: on time? 10 minute late? 2 hours late? 5 minutes early? How about a business meeting?
- Do you usually get directly to the point? Beat around the bush? Somewhere in between? Why?
- What's more important, the group or the individual? Are you more concerned with maintaining harmony with those around you or achieving the best results for yourself?
- When showing someone where something is, do you point? Gesture with one finger? The whole hand? How do you beckon someone? Fingers inward? Outward? What gestures are taboos?
- **The way you answer these questions may be based on culture as much as (or more than) individual personality. Culture influences our behavior in countless ways—subconsciously guiding our actions, reactions and interactions.

Culture May Influence How We Perceive.....

1. **Ourselves**: Are you an "Individualist" who considers their personal well-being above everything or a "Collectivist" who considers the wellbeing of the group more important?

2. **Time**: Some cultures view time as "Linear" and others view time as "Cyclical". Living by a linear clock means: Time is limited and must be used carefully and efficiently; Sticking to schedules, plans and meeting deadlines are highly valued; Punctuality takes precedence over personal needs. Living by a cyclical clock means: Time is unlimited; there is always more of it; there's always tomorrow; Deadlines, plans, and schedules are considered flexible; Personal needs and relationships tend to take precedence over punctuality.

3. **Direct/Indirect Communication**: What is your communication style? "Direct Communicators" say what they mean with little need for reading into things; the idea of saving face is not of major consequence to them in most situations; Silence in conversations is viewed as uncomfortable; Interruptions are common. "Indirect Communicators" imply what they mean; Read into things; Save face and maintain harmony at all costs; Appreciate and expect silence in conversations; Avoid interruptions.

4. **Non-verbal communication**: This encompasses a wide variety of things and refers to "What's NOT being said." The components of nonverbal communication that tend to have the greatest impact on interactions when crossing cultures are:

5. **Spatial Relations**: How far or close you stand, sit, or walk with another person varies widely throughout cultures. Personal space requirements can also vary within a single culture, depending on if you are interacting with family, members of the opposite sex, or business colleagues.

6. **Tactile Communication**: How much touching goes on during conversation is often a cultural trait. People from a "touchy" culture tend to be comfortable with hugs and kisses on the cheek when greeting and departing. During conversations touching on the arm, shoulders, hands, elbows, leg, etc. is very common. People from a "keep your hands to yourself" culture are comfortable with little or no touching.

7. **Eye Contact**: In some cultures, direct eye contact suggests confidence, respect, and interest in what the other person is saying. In other cultures, people expect and appreciate indirect eye contact , which is often viewed as a show of respect, politeness, and reverence.

8. **Gestures**: Each culture has its own set of gestures including hand movements, head nods/shakes, facial expressions, etc. Some cultures have gestures that look similar but mean VERY different things. For example, the thumb up signal means "good job" or "yes/O.K." in most countries, but in Iran it can mean "up yours".

Attitudes

Workplace Personalities and Office Politics

No matter how focused you might want the workplace to be on job skills and performance, many aspects of going to work have more to do with personalities than abilities. **Relationships form the foundation for effective teams — people working with other people.**

The resulting relationships bond people by commonalities. When positive, this synergy establishes a unique and dynamic blending of individuals and personalities that makes the team as a whole more than just the sum of its parts. **The negative flip side is competitive divisions, and sometimes "enemy camps," that polarize and often immobilize the work group.**

A sort of "relationship language" evolves after a time. **People learn to get what they want from each other through indirect methods. These tactics have a give-and-take nature that causes us to view them as "playing games." In the workplace, we call them office politics.** The motivations they reflect are personal — a desire for individual gain, a need for individual attention, a longing for recognition and reward. Because satisfying the motivation often comes at the expense of someone else, we tend to perceive these behaviors as manipulative and self-serving.

At work, everybody wants something — money, status, power. Most people want to come to work and do a good job. They expect recognition, reward, and responsibility. Seems straightforward enough — so why is this a problem? Because people are human. They are naturally competitive. They may do a good job, but they worry that someone else is doing better or receiving misplaced credit. This gives rise to that little bit of manipulation that will maybe assure that others notice their contributions.

Technology gives people new ways to polish the apples they want others to notice. An employee can send out a grandstanding e-mail — one that gives the impression she is managing the project instead of the team member who really is — and copy everyone in the department or (oops!) the entire company. E-mail has become the latest weapon in political agendas, replacing drinks after work and standing outside in the rain to grab a smoke as the ideal venue for pitching an idea or shining shoes. Who gets copied in and who is left off the list is the ultimate political move — checkmate!

Few employee behaviors are as frustrating to managers as the perpetuation of rumors. Rumors can undermine morale and productivity far faster than any genuine bad news. To shut down the rumor mill that exists in most companies, some managers use a system similar to a suggestion box. Employees can deposit their questionable information and the managers then investigates and posts responses on a bulletin board or e-mail them to employees. Other managers appoint an employee committee to handle these activities. If you're worried that this could lead to breaching confidentiality or leaking proprietary information, consider that some form of information is already out there. **The truth is seldom as damaging as the rumors.**

Five Difficult Workplace Types

The workplace is filled with difficult personalities—bullies, know-it-alls, rumor mongers... Our fallback reaction when faced with problem people at work is to either assert ourselves or walk swiftly in **the other direction.**

Your ability to go with the flow is really important when dealing with difficult people.

Here are five difficult workplace types and some communication strategies for each type.

The Narcissist

These types have an inflated sense of self-importance and entitlement, crave attention, and require endless praise. Some are obnoxious ego-maniacs, others can be quite charming. Both types know how to belittle you and make you serve them. Narcissists value control and power over love, and they lack empathy. To get your goals met with narcissists, frame your request in ways they can hear—such as showing them how your request will be beneficial to them. Ego stroking and flattery also work

The Passive-Aggressive Coworker

These types express anger while they're smiling or showing exaggerated concern. They always maintain their cool, even if through clenched teeth. Start by trusting your gut reactions and the feeling that their behavior feels hurtful. If the person is someone you can speak directly with—a team member as opposed to a boss—address the behavior specifically and directly. You could say, for example, "I would greatly appreciate it if you remembered our meeting time. My time's very valuable, as is yours." If the person doesn't or won't change, you can decide whether to accept their behavior or not.

The Gossip

Gossipy busybodies delight in talking about others behind their backs, putting them down, and spreading harmful rumors. They also love to draw others into their toxic conversations. Be direct. Say, "Your comments are inconsiderate and hurtful. How would you like people talking about you like that?" You can also refuse to participate by simply changing the subject. Don't share intimate information with gossip mongers. And finally, don't take gossip personally. Realize that gossips aren't happy or secure. Do what you can to rise to a higher place, and ignore them.

The Anger Addict

Rageaholics deal with conflict by accusing, attacking, humiliating, or criticizing. Count to 10. Pause before you speak. To disarm an anger addict, acknowledge their position, and then politely say you have a slightly different approach you'd like to share. Request a small, doable change that can meet your need. Then clarify how it will benefit the relationship. Finally, empathize. Ask yourself what pain or inadequacy might be making this person act so angry.

The Guilt Tripper

These workplace types are world-class blamers, martyrs, and drama queens. They know how to make you feel terrible about something by pressing your insecurity buttons. Everyone makes mistakes, so if the guilt tripper is scolding you, you can simply apologize or take responsibility, and that will shut them down. Set limits with the guilt tripper. Tell them you can see their point of view, but that it hurts your feelings when they say those things, and you'd be grateful if they stopped saying it.

Unholy Trio: Bullying, Cronyism, and Narcissism

There are numerous accounts of workplace bullying. They have ranged from relatively minor (usually because the victim is able to stand up to the bully and get the bully to back off) to the heart wrenching (people who have to quit their jobs, some who suffer from PTSD, and are on the verge of suicide).

There are two other workplace evils that together with bullying constitute an "unholy trio" that when combined can make a workplace a living hell. There are leaders, bullies themselves, who are able to attract cronies who will side with them and deny that the leader is a bully. **In fact, these cronies will represent to higher authorities that the bully-leader is a "caring and compassionate" leader, and that the victim is really the problem.** In exchange, the bully-leader gives favors and resources to these cronies, and the cycle of persecution continues for the poor victims.

All too often, these bullies feel justified for their actions against victims. Since they can do no wrong (in their own minds), the victim is the problem, and the bullies feel justified in their persecution. **The guess is the intent is to bully the person in order to get the victim to quit.** The misguided bullies believe, in their narcissistic thinking, that this will create a better workplace,

Bullying, cronyism, and narcissism thrive in the workplace because other employees ("bystanders" to the bullying process), and higher-level leaders, refuse to get involved. Often, this is simply, on the part of the leaders and some bystanders, the desire to avoid any sort of conflict. In many cases, the bystanders - and even the higher-level leaders - are afraid that the bullies and their cronies may turn their destructive behavior on them.

In the case of some higher-level leaders, the bully and cronies are able to dupe them with their assertion that the victim is the real problem. **When that happens, it is usually because the leader is not doing his or her job of monitoring what is really going on at the lower levels of the organization. In any case, the unholy trio continues ultimately because of a failure of leadership.**

Summary

Adverse action claims by employees are on the rise and with no limit on the amount of compensation that a Court can award to a disgruntled employee; employers are increasingly finding themselves trapped in a legal nightmare. As more businesses are being forced to respond to these claims, there is a need for managers and employers to understand this area of law and how to minimize the risk of a claim.

Basically, if anything happens or is threatened to happen at a workplace or a potential workplace that a worker feels could or does "adversely" affect them in any way, and this thing can be linked to a "prohibited reason", the worker can take the employer or prospective employer to court and can potentially make a lot of money.

"Prohibited reasons" mean the usual raft of discrimination-related descriptors such as age, gender, political affiliation and so on but also include "exercising a workplace right", an undefined legal concept.

What can be done about disruptive behavior?

At the first sign of conflict check if your company has a workplace violence program or a code of conduct that addresses psychological intimidation and aggression that is not based on a protected characteristic. It can be useful to talk to the aggressor if you are comfortable with that. The person may deny the aggression, but you have let them know that you are aware and consider it unprofessional. Or talk with someone you absolutely trust in the workplace that can advise you and advocate for you while keeping your situation confidential.

Organizations can intervene to build a collaborative safety culture by directing attention to safety and creating contexts where people speak up and problem solve together. They can create a Code of Conduct that defines professional behaviors and unacceptable behaviors and includes policies and procedures for response.

Employees sign a statement of commitment to abide by the Code of Conduct and encourage reporting - conduct regular surveys and focus groups. Managers and Supervisors follow-up – analyze and respond to data. Leadership provides training for leaders, managers and all staff on how to respond and define a framework for understanding and addressing disruptive behavior.

The framework represents a graduated-level, peer-involved intervention. This intervention has strong potential for changing the culture because many individuals in the organization are actively involved in carrying out the intervention. The approach to intervening at each level should be supportive rather than punitive.

Description of Intervention Levels:

Informal Intervention is "a cup of coffee conversation" for single "unprofessional" incidents.

A peer or supervisor selects a private setting for a brief review of the event with the disruptive person, pauses for a response, listens and invites the perspective of the person who behaved unprofessionally. The person may be defensive, minimizing or rationalizing. The response to this is, "Despite the situation, there are professional and unprofessional ways to respond and we expect a professional response." Conclude with discussing options for professional responses.

Level 1: Awareness Intervention

Takes place after an apparent pattern develops and is identified by the surveillance system or reporting, when there is a threat to quality and safety. An authority figure or peer shares a compilation of complaint data or report data from staff in a supportive manner. Most individuals respond professionally and adjust behavior, reducing patient and staff complaints.

Level 2: Authority Intervention

When the pattern persists and the person is unable or unwilling to respond to the awareness intervention and change their behavior, the authority intervention is implemented. At this level, leaders develop an improvement and evaluation plan with accountability built in. Leaders specify what behaviors need to improve, what support or services are needed, a timeline, and what the outcome will be if the improvement and evaluation plan is not successful. This intervention should be supportive rather than punitive. Most individuals want to improve but may be hindered by work or family stress, substance abuse

Level 3: Disciplinary Intervention

A lack of response to the authority intervention leads to the disciplinary intervention which includes restriction or termination of privileges, reporting to government entities and other actions related to the Code of Conduct policies and procedures as do all levels of the Disruptive Behavior Pyramid Intervention framework. Surveillance systems are required to provide information and data related to the disruptive behavior problems, or mental health issues.

Disruptive behavior pyramid:
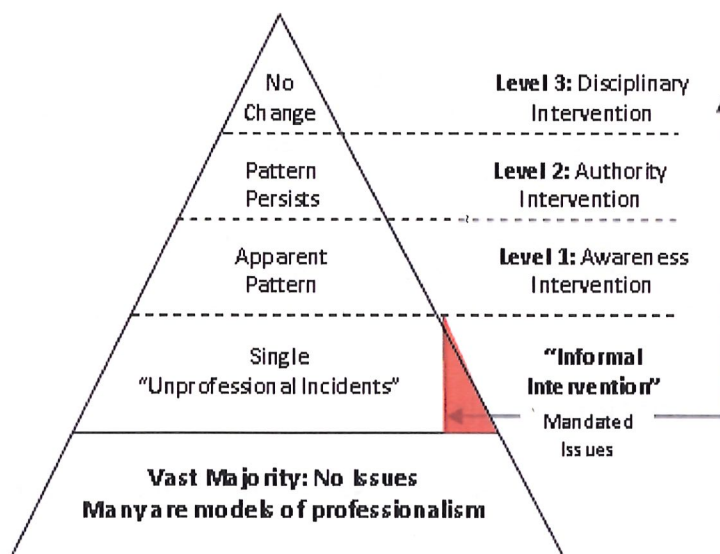
Hickson, G.B., Pichert, J.W., Webb, L.E., & Gabbe, S.G. (2007).
A complementary approach to promoting professionalism:
Identifying, measuring, and addressing unprofessional behaviors.
Academic Medicine, 82, 1040-1048.

Bullying is clearly an organizational, not an individual, problem. Executive decisions collectively create and sustain working environments. Employers unilaterally establish work conditions except when constrained by the rare collective bargaining agreements (only 7.5% of the private sector is unionized).

Solving the problem is not only an organization-wide responsibility but successful efforts requiring the total commitment of top-level organizational leadership, involvement of middle-management, and engagement of employees. Short-term approaches such as identifying lone perpetrators while ignoring initiating and maintaining factors ultimately fails to produce

We have reviewed the issue of workplace bullying: its causes, consequences, and potential corrections. **The human and institutional losses associated with bullying are inexcusable, since it is completely preventable.** Despite certain capital-labor ideologies that dehumanize workers and posit that increased pressure increases productivity, there is no evidence that bullying nets any substantive gains for organizations. Quite the contrary—workplace bullying is counter to the best interests of organizations and their stakeholders. There is considerable evidence that bullying affects millions of U.S. workers. As such, it deserves concerted attention by researchers, practitioners, and public policy makers.

Turning Around Negative Attitudes

Negative employee attitudes and beliefs need to be addressed because they can create a long term culture of failure that infects even new employees. Here are some ideas on how management can work to turn around negative attitudes.

At one time or another, organizations develop an over-abundance of "negative energy" or attitudes. Sometimes they can be linked to organizational trauma, like down-sizing, budget restraints or workload increases, but sometimes they evolve over time with no apparent triggering event. The negative organization is characterized by increased complaining, a focus on reasons why things can't be done, and what seems to be a lack of hope that things will get better. It feels like the organization in stuck in treacle. And, it's contagious. Negativism can affect even the most positive employees.

What can you do?

Based on an article by Arthur Beck and Ellis Hillmar, professors in organization development at University of Richmond, they suggest the following:

Model Positive Behavior

If management is walking negative and talking in a negative way, staff will follow. Don't do it. Expect a lot, support staff, hold them accountable, confront them and be clear and honest. Set standards for your own work and relations with employees, and work towards meeting them to set an example of positive behavior.

Acknowledge Negativity

You can't ignore negativity and expect it to go away. If you do not acknowledge it, then staff will feel that you are out of touch, and will not be confident in your abilities. Acknowledge the frustration negative feelings, and do not try to convince the person or people that they shouldn't have their negative feelings. However, when you are acknowledging employees' negative feelings, try asking them for suggestions regarding what to do about them.

Look For and Identify The Positives In All Situations

Sometimes we forget to find positives. When an employee makes an impractical solution, we are quick to dismiss the idea. We should be identifying the effort while gently discussing the idea. Look for small victories, and talk about them. Turning a negative organization into a positive one is a result of thousands of little actions.

Give Positive Recognition Often

Provide positive recognition as soon as you find out about good performance. Do not couple positive strokes with suggestions for improvement. Separate them. Combining them devalues the recognition for many people.

Refrain From Collusion on Negativity

It is easy to get caught in the general complaining and bitching, particularly in informal discussions. When faced with negative conversations, consider changing the subject, comment on the negative content ("Let's talk about something more pleasant"), or ask what can be done about the situation (move from negative to positive slant).

Difficult people in general—don't just affect their bosses or one or two people. They affect many, many people around them. Left to their own devices, they can bring real work to a virtual halt, cause good employees to quit and generally make the office a lousy place to be.

Generally speaking, two management styles are associated with harassment and bullying: coercive/authoritarian (Hoel & Salin, 2003) and laizzefaire (Di Martino, Hoel, & Cooper, 2003). The former may use bullying to "motivate" workers; the latter typically fails to intervene when workers report being abused. Unfortunately, when most employers are notified about bullying incidents, they either do nothing or worsen the situation by fostering retaliation against the complainant (Keashy, 2001; Namie, 2007).

A Few More Quick Tips:

- Hold a strategic planning session to focus on a positive future (but make sure it is well facilitated).
- Encourage staff to find creative ways to make the work environment more enjoyable.
- Encourage staff to be involved in decision-making and delegate where possible.
- Introduce a "work-smart" program to dehassle the workplace.

Conclusion

It is not uncommon for organizations to go through periods of negativity. Managers play important roles in determining if that negativity will increase, or whether the trough is relatively short. **Above all, remember that it is the little things that you do, day in and day out, that make the difference.**

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